

The Summation of All Things in Christ

Studies in Ephesians with a Local Church Emphasis

LESSON XXIII : GOD MAKES ALIVE / RAISES UP DEAD SINNERS BY GRACE (2:4-10)

God Makes Alive / Raises Up Dead Sinners by Grace (2:1-10)

And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: that in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. (KJV)

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (NIV)

Also you — being dead in the trespasses and the sins, in which once ye did walk according to the age of this world, according to the ruler of the authority of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all did walk once in the desires of our flesh, doing the wishes of the flesh and of the thoughts, and were by nature children of wrath — as also the others, and God, being rich in kindness, because of His great love with which He loved us, even being dead in the trespasses, did make us to live together with the Christ, (by grace ye are having been saved,) and did raise [us] up together, and did seat [us] together in the heavenly [places] in Christ Jesus, that He might show, in the ages that are coming, the exceeding riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus, for by grace ye are having been saved, through faith, and this not of you — of God the gift, not of works, that no one may boast; for of Him we are workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to good works, which God did before prepare, that in them we may walk. (Young’s Literal Translation)

Form and Structure

Paul begins a new sentence (vv 1-7) but is broken, the subject and verb is not given until vv 4,5 where the sentence begins again

¹ And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins,

having mentioned sin, Paul digresses into the depravity of man before continuing his original thought

² in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, ³ among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

he now continues his original intent by repeating how he began

⁴ But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),

⁶ and raised us up together,

and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,

⁷ that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

Paul now begins the second sentence (vv 8-10) providing a summary of the nature of the salvation achieved by God

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast. ¹⁰ For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. (Eph 2:1-10 NKJV)

V. 8 — for by grace you are saved through faith, — τῆ γὰρ χάριτί ἐστε σεσωσμένοι διὰ πίστεως· [tē gar chariti este sesōsmenoi dia pisteōs;] these are the same words as the parenthetical statement in v. 5 with a couple exceptions: first, it begins with an explanatory “for,” second, there is a definite article before “grace,” and third, the addition of “through faith.”

for by grace — τῆ γὰρ χάριτί [tē gar chariti] **“More exactly, ‘by the grace,’ i.e., by this grace, the grace already mentioned [in v. 5]. Grace is the explanation of their own salvation, and how surpassingly rich the grace must be that could effect that!”** [Salmond, Expositor’s GK Testament, 289]

you are saved — ἐστε σεσωσμένοι [este sesōsmenoi] as noted in v. 5, the full sense of the phrase is, **‘By grace you have been saved in past time completely, with the result that you are in a state of salvation which persists through present time.’**

FAITH IS NOT THE GROUNDS OF OUR SALVATION — through faith = διὰ πίστεως [dia pisteōs] this phrase (found in Rom, 2 Cor, Gal, Eph, Phil, Col and 2 Tim) is used 14x in the NT while a similar phrase (lit, “out of faith,” found only in Rom and Gal) is used 21x. Its use in Rom 3:22 and Gal 2:16 proves the English terms are synonymous (using the same Greek word ‘dia’):

‘even the righteousness of God, through faith [διὰ πίστεως, dia pisteōs] in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference’ (Rom 3:22 NKJV)

‘knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith [διὰ πίστεως, dia pisteōs] in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.’ (Gal 2:16 NKJV)

In Rom 3:30 Paul uses both ‘through faith’ (‘dia’) and ‘out of faith’ (‘ek’) in the same sentence, illustrating that these two terms are interchangeable:

‘since there is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith [ἐκ πίστεως, ek pisteōs] and the uncircumcised through faith’ [διὰ τῆς πίστεως, dia tēs pisteōs] (Rom 3:30 NKJV)

A few other places in Romans where Paul says ‘out of faith’ (‘ek’):

‘Therefore, having been justified by faith, [ἐκ πίστεως, ek pisteōs] we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ’ (Rom 5:1 NKJV)

‘What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith [ἐκ πίστεως, ek pisteōs] ... Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, [ἐκ πίστεως, ek pisteōs] but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone.’ (Rom 9:30, 32 NKJV)

It is important to note that Paul always says we are saved ‘through’ faith or ‘out of’ faith but never ‘because of’ faith. While faith is the channel or human instrument used to appropriate salvation, the grounds or basis of our salvation is the objective death of Christ on the behalf of sinners. We are being technically incorrect when say we are saved because we believe; we are saved because of the actions of Christ, not our faith. “[Paul] uses the genitive and not the accusative in the phrase διὰ πίστεως [dia pisteōs] for **believers are saved not because of their faith but through it; it is their response to what God has done; it represents their openness to his activity; it is not something which combined with that activity produces salvation. God’s activity and human receptiveness are two sides of one coin.**” [Best, 226; see also Salmond, Expositor’s GK Testament, 289] “From the very nature of faith, as an act of assent and trust, it excludes the idea of merit. If by faith, it is of grace; if of works, it is of debt; as the apostle argues in Rom. 4, 4. 5. Faith, therefore, is the mere *causa apprehendens*, the simple act of accepting, and not the ground on which salvation is bestowed.” [Hodge, Ephesians]

THE IMPORTANT THING IS THE OBJECT OF THE FAITH — faith = “trust, reliance, confidence” in either people or gods. It is used 243x in the NT. **“‘Faith’ is always faith in someone or something; its object is not here defined but in 1.13, 15; 3.12 it is Christ and we may assume it is the same here.”** [Best, 226] **This is critical; all people have faith in something... what is the object of your faith? Your church? Your baptism? Your good deeds? Or is your faith solely resting upon the merits of Jesus Christ?** We all probably know some who have a strong faith but their faith is misplaced.

THE NATURE OF FAITH — “This is more than an intellectual acknowledgment; the main elements of faith is (1) a firm conviction, fully acknowledging the truth of God’s word; (2) a personal surrender to Him; and (3) conduct inspired by such surrender.” [Best, 226] **This is critically important! Do we realize many who have ‘believed in Christ’ (or better, ‘professed to believe in Christ’) will not be in heaven? This is easily proven in Scripture:**

‘Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’” (Matt 7:21-23 NKJV)

“Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure” (2 Pet 1:10 NKJV) Peter is admonishing ‘believers’ to make sure they are truly saved.

“But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.” (Heb 10:39 NKJV) The author of Hebrews is contrasting those who ‘profess yet draw back’ with those who ‘believe to the saving of

their soul.’

“For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man — and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.” (Rom 1:20-23 NKJV) Here Paul talks of those who ‘knew’ God yet were not saved. This obviously was not ‘knowing’ in the sense of a personal relationship but what we would say today was a ‘head knowledge’ instead of a ‘heart knowledge.’

“Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did. But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men, and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man. There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, ‘Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.’ Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.’” (John 2:23-3:3 NKJV) For the masses, many wanted to ‘follow’ Jesus because of the signs yet Jesus knew there was not true commitment on their part. But apart from the masses, one did come to Jesus whose heart was being worked upon by the Holy Spirit. We see Nicodemus later standing up for his Savior (John 19:38-40).

“Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this, said, ‘This is a hard saying; who can understand it?’ When Jesus knew in Himself that His disciples complained about this, He said to them, ‘Does this offend you? What then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before? It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life. But there are some of you who do not believe.’ For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who would betray Him. And He said, ‘Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father.’ From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. Then Jesus said to the twelve, ‘Do you also want to go away?’ But Simon Peter answered Him, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’” (John 6:21-69 NKJV) In John 6 the people wanted to crown Jesus as King (John 6:15). Who would not want to make Him King? – here was a Man who could meet all their material needs! But Jesus deliberately spoke in an offensive manner to the crowd and a vast majority turned away. But as Jesus asked the Twelve if they were leaving as well, Peter’s answer is the only answer a believer should give: ‘Lord, to whom shall we go?’ (Please note that while Peter’s answer is classic, neither the leaving nor staying was definitive: there may have been some true disciples, weak in the faith who were offended and left for a time while one of those who stayed was Judas.)

“He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.” (John 3:36 NKJV) The first word for ‘believe’ is our normal word for ‘believe, faith,’ but the second usage that is translated either as ‘believe’ (Tyndale’s NT, KJV, NKJV, YLT) or ‘obey’ (Geneva Bible, ASV, RSV, NASV, ESV) is a different word, ἀπειθεῖν [apeithōn]. This second word is defined by the Greek dictionaries (‘Lexicons’) as follows:

- (1) in relation to God disobey, be disobedient; or – (2) of the most severe form of disobedience, in relation to the gospel message: disbelieve, refuse to believe, be an unbeliever [Friberg Lexicon]
- unwillingness or refusal to comply with the demands of some authority – ‘to disobey, disobedience.’ [Louw-Nida Lexicon]
- to be disobedient, refuse compliance, to disobey [Liddell-Scott Lexicon]
- not to allow oneself to be persuaded; not to comply with; to refuse or withhold belief [Thayer’s Greek Lexicon]

The word has the sense of ‘belief resulting in obedience.’ Therefore while ‘do not believe’ is not an incorrect translation, one can understand why some translates it as ‘do not obey’:

‘Hee that beleeueth in the Sonne, hath euerlasting life, and hee that obeyeth not the Sonne, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.’ (John 3:36 Geneva Bible)

‘He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.’ (John 3:36 NASV)

‘Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.’ (John 3:36 ESV)

Years ago at Emmanuel Baptist Church in Dayton OH while Pastor Fisher was still ministering, there was a man in the congregation that had a saying he would often repeat. This was not said harshly but rather with a smile. Whenever someone would profess faith in Christ he would comment, “Only time and the devil will tell.” Again, not rudely or in an offensive manner but rather just a statement of fact. I agreed with him then and now many years later, I would still say he was correct.

FAITH, OBEDIENCE AND ETERNAL SECURITY – “WHAT PRACTICAL DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE?” —

Someone who does not accept eternal security believes when a person trusts Christ as Savior, they will either ‘hold out faithful to the end’ or backslide and lose their salvation. Someone who accepts eternal security believes that when a person makes a ‘profession of faith’ in Christ, that profession is either real or not. If it is real, that person will endure to the end; if it is a false profession then that person will probably fall away from the faith. Since both situations have essentially the same results the question may be asked, ‘What practical difference does it make whether one believes in eternal security?’ Some thoughts:

- **Eternal security is more consistent with the Scriptures.** – Denying eternal security does not just effect this single teaching. If one does not accept eternal security then one does not truly understand the nature of sin, the depravity of man, justification, propitiation, redemption, imputation, election, sanctification, the providential working of God, and the list could continue. To misunderstand eternal security is to misunderstand all these great doctrines and more.
- **Being able to lose one’s salvation places the emphasis upon man; eternal security places the emphasis upon the Lord.** – When one denies eternal security then their Christian life is focused inward: ‘am I living right? Am I going to be able to hang on? What if I sin and fall away? Can the Lord forgive this in my life?’ When they are walking with Christ then the focus becomes ‘I am living a good Christian life, God is pleased with my walk. I am doing God’s will, God is greatly using me.’ *This is all man-centered, both negatively (fear) and positively (pride).*
- **Eternal security provides peace.** – In contrast with the above which cannot ultimately provide peace (even if one is walking faithfully now, there is no guarantee they will not fall away before death), trusting the Lord that He can take us home provides peace. *It is not that ‘I am so good’ or ‘I am so faithful and obedient’ but that while God has given me a heart that wants to be pleasing to Him, I know that no matter what comes the Lord will bring me through it.* This peace also effects our walk with Christ: the illustration has been given of men working on a roof. One without restraints is cautious and nervous, knowing any wrong step could bring great harm or death. But the workers with safety restraints can move freely and concentrate on their work. A balanced understanding of eternal security provides rest and peace to our souls.
- **Being able to lose one’s salvation minimizes sin.** – When considering what can make someone lose their salvation, the obvious answer is sin. Therefore to believe one can ‘hold on’ and ‘live without sin’ is to minimize and externalize sin. *Sin is no longer a condition of the heart but is limited to outward actions. The Christian life becomes external:* what I wear, how short is my hair, how long is my skirt, how much make-up I wear, what Bible I carry, how often I am in church, my work for the church, and on and on it goes. *All are externals, not matters of the heart. But the Scriptures focus on our hearts, our thoughts and our attitudes more than the externals, understanding that all external actions begin in the heart of man. A Spirit-guided look at our hearts produces a loathing of our sin natures and love, worship and adoration for our Savior.*
- **The reason for not wanting to sin is misplaced if one does not accept eternal security.** – One who does not believe in eternal security does not want to sin because they do not want to lose their salvation. *But when one accepts the doctrine of eternal security, their fear of sin is no longer about themselves but about their Heavenly Father. Sin grieves our Father. Our sin hurts the heart of the One who gave His life for us. As a parent hurts when they see their children doing something which will ultimately bring them pain, our Heavenly Father hurts as we dabble with sin.* So for the child of God accepting eternal security, we do not want to sin because we love our Father in heaven. Our highest goal is to be pleasing in His sight and that is one of the major reasons why we abhor sin. One denying eternal security would agree with many of these statements but when their walk with the Lord is not right, their thoughts turn to hell, not to a grieving Father.
- **Not believing in eternal security misinterprets how the Lord may providentially work in their sanctification.** – *Anyone who has walked with the Lord for years understand He often works in ways that are hard and sometimes quite painful. Sometimes when the doors are closed, the ceiling brass and the Lord is ‘nowhere to be found’ (what the Puritans would call ‘a frowning providence’) could be misunderstood to be disfavor with the Lord or even that the Lord has cast them aside. However a strong belief in eternal security, trusting the Lord is providentially guiding and allowing all circumstances allows those times of doubt to become periods of growth in our faith and trust in the Lord. I believe even the great John the Baptist suffered doubts and discouragement when he sent his disciples to Christ to verify He was the One. And in the midst of what could have been John*



the Baptist's lowest point in his life, Jesus said of him, 'Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist.' (Matt 11:11 NKJV) ***So it is possible that when we are at our lowest and life has turned against us and we are struggling to be pleasing to our Lord, it may be that is when He is smiling and 'most proud of us', if you can forgive the human illustration.*** (see Appendix A: Havner)

● **Balance: we are all inconsistent in some areas.** – Allow me to balance some of the above thoughts. Many who deny eternal security would disagree with some of the comments concerning their belief. They would be quick to respond 'We don't fear hell, we want to live pleasing to our Father, we don't walk in pride,' etc. And I believe they are sincere with their responses. But to be consistent with their theology, I believe the above to be accurate. All I can say is that all believers live with inconsistencies. There are many good and humble believers who deny eternal security but love the Lord. While I would disagree with their theology in this matter, I am thankful for their stand for the Lord. (see Appendix B: Spurgeon)

FAITH IS NOT A "WORK" ACCORDING TO SCRIPTURE — It should be also noted faith is never considered a work in scripture. This verse is a good ground for that teaching because Paul states salvation is "through faith" but immediately adds "not of works lest any should boast." Another example is Abraham: Paul states, '*But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness*' (Rom 4:5 NKJV). But in the preceding verse Paul states that if salvation was by works, it would be something God owed the sinner and not by grace: "now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due" (Rom 4:4). ***"In Paul's thinking faith can never be viewed as a meritorious work because in connection with justification he always contrasts faith with works of the law (cf. Gal 2:16; 3:2-5, 9, 10; Rom 3:27, 28). Faith involves the abandonment of any attempt to justify oneself and an openness to God which is willing to accept what he has done in Christ. The same applies here in regards to salvation. Faith is a human activity but a specific kind of activity, a response which allows salvation to become operative, which receives what has already been accomplished in Christ."*** [Lincoln, 111]

APPENDIX A: The Forgotten Beatitude by Vance Havner

“Blessed is he who keeps from stumbling over me” — Matthew 11:6

We are familiar with the beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount. We are also acquainted with other beatitudes of our Lord, such as “Blessed is that servant whom his Lord when he comes shall find so doing”; “Blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it.”

But here is a little beatitude, short and sandwiched between longer verses, so that we are in danger of passing it up altogether: “Blessed is he who keeps from stumbling over me.”

John the Baptist was in prison. That rugged, ascetic Elijah of the New Testament, prophet of the outdoors, was certainly out of place in a damp, dark dungeon. No wonder he had the blues. One day his feelings hit a record low and he sent a delegation to Jesus to ask, “Art thou he that should come or do we look for another?” Now, that was a serious doubt for John the Baptist. The very thing he had preached like a living exclamation point had become a question mark to the preacher himself. It was not the first or last time that a preacher’s affirmation has become, in a dungeon, a preacher’s interrogation. It reminds us of another prophet of the dungeon, Jeremiah, who cried to God from the depths, “Wilt thou be altogether unto me as a liar and as waters that fail?”

But our Lord did not reprimand John the Baptist. It is noteworthy that two of the strongest characters in the Bible had something akin to a nervous breakdown. Elijah, in the Old Testament, collapsed under the juniper, and God had to feed and rest him. More than one Christian, exhausted, with nerves on edge, has imagined that he is the last survivor of the saints. And usually he needs not reproof but rest. Then here is John the Baptist of the camel’s hair vestments and victuals of locusts and wild honey, who could reprove kings and call religious people sons of snakes; here is John the Baptist down in the dumps even as you and I! It is one thing to stand on Jordan and give it, another thing to stay in jail and take it!

But what did Jesus do? Did he bitterly reprove the troubled prophet? Did He say, “I’m ashamed of you, disappointed in you. What will people think?” He did nothing of the sort. He did not even send John a tract on “How To Be Happy In Jail!” On the contrary, on the day that John the Baptist made his poorest remark about Jesus, Jesus said the best thing about John the Baptist: “Among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist!” For Jesus knew his frame and remembered that he was dust.

John had preached a victorious Messiah with fan in hand, purging His floor, gathering His wheat into the garner but burning the chaff with unquenchable fire. And here was Jesus, not carrying on that way at all but meek and lowly, going about doing good. And John couldn’t figure it out. The devil got in his doubts as in Eden. John began wondering and then worrying, for one begets the other.

Our Lord’s answer to John’s question is simple. The blind are seeing, the deaf are hearing, the lame are walking, the lepers are being cleansed and the poor have the Gospel preached to them. In other words, “I am running on schedule and carrying out my program as planned. It may not be as you expected but do not be upset by it.”

This is a day of dungeons, and many saints are in the clutches of Giant Despair. There is comfort here for us. If a husky Lion Heart like John the Baptist could faint, “brethren, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial that is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you.” Your temptation is common unto man and there is a way of escape.

John’s trouble, like most trouble, did not come singly, it was twofold. There was depression and there was doubt. Dungeons bring depression and depression brings doubt. Are you in a dungeon? Not behind visible lock and key perhaps, but while “stone walls do not a prison make nor iron bars a cage,” it is also true that other things than prison walls do a prison make and other than iron bars may form a cage. Is your trouble financial? Maybe your blood pressure is up and your bank account down. Maybe you are physically ill but you keep going and everyone thinks because you are walking you are well! Maybe you have lost a loved one and a shroud of melancholy hangs heavy on your soul. Perhaps you dread to see night fall and search for rest as men seek for hidden treasure. Dungeons bring depression and from depression it is easy to move into doubt, even doubt about Jesus. Then we are upset and offended and we need to learn the Forgotten Beatitude.

It is nothing new to be offended in Jesus. More people have been offended in Him than in any character in history. Away with this milk-and-water preaching about Jesus! He has caused more offense than any other person who ever lived. He is either a sanctuary or a stumbling stone (Isaiah 8:14). He was an offense to His own nation and still is (Romans 9:33). He offended the Pharisees (Matthew 15:12). He offended the people of His own home town (Matthew 13:54-58). He offended superficial disciples (John 6). His cross is an offense (1 Cor. 1:23). And even true disciples may be offended in Him (Matthew 26:31-35). Sound believers sometimes get into a dungeon and pout with the Lord and say, “It is vain to serve God, and what profit is it that we have kept His ordinances and walked mournfully before the Lord of Hosts.”

Don’t you look pious, for we all have done it! We have murmured that we pray and do not receive. We gave our tithe and now we are in adversity. We were faithful to the Lord’s house and landed in a hospital. We prayed for our children and they became worldlings. We craved joy and peace but we are despondent. Across the street is an ungodly family that has suffered no loss, while our dearest was taken. “There is no use in praying. It reads very lovely in the devotional books but I seem unable to make it work.”



Vance Havner, 1901-1986

We were in distress, and the Lord “abode where he was” and when He did appear we grumbled like Martha when she said, “If you had been here my brother would not have died.”

All such grumbling means that we have not learned the Forgotten Beatitude. Anybody can believe during fair weather. There is a deeper experience and a higher state which not many reach, a state in which, no matter what happens, we are never offended in the Lord, a state in which, whether it makes sense to us or not, we still believe Romans 8:28. Habakkuk started his book pouting and ended it praising. And blessed is the man who can say: “Though I don’t get what I want: though I may sow much and reap little; though others get the plums and I get the sack, I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in the God of my salvation.”

When Thomas asked for visible evidence of the risen Lord, he was asking for a smaller blessing than he already had, the privilege of believing without seeing, for “blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed.” God wants us to trust Him, no matter what He does. There is a heavenly carelessness that leaves it all with Jesus and doesn’t become upset when He does things contrary to what we expected. And there will be plenty of things that just don’t make sense. John the Baptist must have wondered, “If Jesus can raise the dead, why can’t He get me out of jail?” The little boy who couldn’t understand why God put so many vitamins in spinach and didn’t put them all in ice cream was already beginning to see that things just don’t work out as we’d like for them to. There is much that is baffling, but if we can’t understand it, by grace we can stand under it, we can see to it that we are not offended, and that is better than understanding it! Some things we are to know (Matthew 13:11) and some things we are not to know (Acts 1:7), and we would be happier if we spent the time we waste on trying to fathom the unknowable in learning the knowable.

God did not explain suffering to Job. He gave him revelation, which was better than explanation. Better than having all our questions answered is to say, “The Lord knows what He is doing and I will not be offended.”

In this dark hour of world distress not a few believers are in the dumps. Jesus seems not to be carrying on as expected. The world is not being converted. Has Christ failed? He isn’t transforming the social order. Is He the One or shall we look for another? Many have been mistaught and have misunderstood His mission, His motive, His message, His method. It is true that He is not converting the world. He didn’t say He would. But He has not failed, He is running on schedule. Blind eyes are opening to the Light of the world. Deaf ears are hearing His voice. Lame souls are taking up their beds and walking. Lepers, like Naaman of old, are dipping in Jordan and coming up with flesh like that of a little child. The dead in trespasses and sins are awaking to Christ, their Life and Light, and to the poor the Gospel is still begin preached. Christ is carrying on as intended. He has never missed an appointment. He may seem slow but He is never late. We need not be offended because He is not converting the world. He didn’t promise to, but He did promise to return in clouds of glory and reign until all enemies are put under His feet. Let us therefore take our stand on His Word and hide it in our hearts, for “great peace have they who love your law: and nothing can make them stumble” (Psalm 119:165).

APPENDIX B: No 'Free Will' Prayers by Charles Spurgeon

You have heard a great many Arminian sermons, I dare say; but you never heard an Arminian prayer — for the saints in prayer appear as one in word, and deed and mind. An Arminian on his knees would pray desperately like a Calvinist. He cannot pray about free will: there is no room for it. Fancy him praying, 'Lord, I thank thee I am not like those poor presumptuous Calvinists. Lord, I was born with a glorious free will; I was born with power by which I can turn to thee of myself; I have improved my grace. If everybody had done the same with their grace that I have, they might all have been saved. Lord, I know thou dost not make us willing if we are not willing ourselves. Thou givest grace to everybody; some do not improve it, but I do. There are many that will go to hell as much bought with the blood of Christ as I was; they had as much of the Holy Ghost given to them; they had as good a chance, and were as much blessed as I am. It was not thy grace that made us differ; I know it did a great deal, still I turned the point; I made use of what was given me, and others did not — that is the difference between me and them.'

That is a prayer for the devil, for nobody else would offer such a prayer as that. Ah! when they are preaching and talking very slowly, there may be wrong doctrine; but when they come to pray, the true thing slips out; they cannot help it. If a man talks very slowly, he may speak in a fine manner; but when he comes to talk fast, the old brogue of his country, where he was born, slips out.

[from 'Free Will — A Slave' by C. H. Spurgeon; a sermon delivered Sunday morning, December 2, 1855, at New Park Street Chapel, London, England]